



Fight for funding

By KEVIN LILLY

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Thursday's record-tying drug raid throughout the city and county not only put drug dealers and users behind bars, but it may get the attention of senators who allocate money for drug task forces throughout the country, police hope.

Some 40 other states and Indiana's 23 drug task forces participated in a nationwide effort to eliminate drugs from the community and to prove the necessity of funding drug task forces across the country, said Lt. Cathi Collins of the Logansport Police Department.

The Logansport-Cass County Multijurisdictional Drug Task Force with officers from the Logansport Police Department, the Cass County Sheriff's Department and the Indiana State Police joined forces to arrest 41 people in less than 36 hours Thursday. They were sending a message about the importance of the Edward G. Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Grant that funds most of the drug task forces throughout the United States.

What would happen if funding to the grant is cut?

It would likely fall back on the city and county government, said Logansport Police Chief Randy Rozzi. "We will find a way to fund it, but it would be tough."

President Bush eliminated the Byrne grant from the federal budget in both 2006 and 2007. With the help of the Indiana Drug Enforcement Association and 42 other state narcotic officers associations and the National Narcotic Officers' Association Coalition, they were able to get \$417 million put back into the budget for 2006 and are now working on getting the money put back into the 2007 budget, said Collins.

Currently the House has set the budget at \$442 million and it goes before the Senate the first week of August. An amendment will be presented by Senator Saxby Chambliss (R-GA) and Senator Mark Dayton (D-MN) which has bi-partisan support to increase the grant funding to \$900 million for 2006 and 2007.

As a former detective who worked narcotic cases, Rozzi knows how much work it takes to make charges stick. He said narcotics officers have worked the "Bought & Paid For" cases for six months.

"It takes a lot of overtime and a lot of manpower," Rozzi said. "It is not a five-day, 40-hour a week job. Narcotics officers work morning, afternoon, and night, and they get called on the weekend quite often. A lot of resources you have to bring in to make something like this happen."

The Byrne grant provides funds for the prosecutor and deputy prosecutors as well as drug task forces. The local drug task force is comprised of Cass, Carroll, Pulaski and White counties and the Indiana State Police with Cass County Prosecutor Kevin Enyeart as the project director.

After securing a suspected meth lab on Ind. 25 north of Logansport, First Sergeant Bob Land of the Indiana State Police spoke of how the funding makes that kind of operation possible.

“We’re trying to show that we are out here doing the job, and we need more funding to make sure we can keep doing this. I know this was part of a statewide effort to show the legislators that we still need funding to do this type of work.”

Logansport Assistant Police Chief A.J. Rozzi said law enforcement is doing just enough to keep up with the drug epidemic, especially methamphetamine production.

“You’d like to stick all your manpower on it and try to wipe out drugs in the city of Logansport and Cass County, but it’s just not going to happen. You go after the bigger people, and you try to keep it from getting out of control,” he said.

With reduced funding to battle the drug problem, it becomes even more of a burden on the cities and counties to try to keep it under control.

“Without that federal funding, it is going to be harder for the cities and counties to keep going at it at the rate we are going.”

Collins says law enforcement groups from across the nation will continue to push for “robust” funding for the drug task force program.

State and national statistics that were gathered at the close of the day on Thursday and submitted to the Indiana State Police were not released Friday as scheduled. Once compiled and released, a follow-up story will be published in the Pharos-Tribune.

Kevin Lilly can be reached at 722-5000, Ext. 5117, or via e-mail at kevin.lilly@pharostribune.com